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Bricolage and Identity Work

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Lévi-Strauss' concept of bricolage has been used widely in a variety of management and organizational studies to highlight creative 'situational tinkering'. Yet, we know little about 'the bricoleur' beyond the assumption of a functional agent responding to conditions of resource scarcity or environmental complexity. As such, studies offer limited possibilities in explaining the occurrence of bricolage in the absence of external demands, or much about who the bricoleur is. Drawing on 136 in-depth interviews with management consultants, this study argues for a richer understanding of bricolage by exploring the identity of the bricoleur. In doing so, the paper achieves three outcomes. First, it uses the original symbolic and cultural insights of bricolage made by Lévi-Strauss to detail how bricoleur identities are constructed; Second, it highlights how different organizational strategies enable and constrain the pursuit of bricoleur identities; Finally, it emphasizes the bricoleur's status as primarily an aspirational elite identity in the context of consultancy work, in contrast to its usual treatment as a 'low status' activity.

Introduction

Introduced by Lévi-Strauss (1966) to conceptualize the mode of thought of indigenous people, 'bricolage' has gained popularity as a common trope in a wide variety of fields within management and organization studies (Perkmann and Spicer, 2014). Generally conceptualized as situational tinkering, 'making do' and recombining available materials in a creative manner (Baker, Miner and Eesley, 2003; Weick, 1993), bricolage has been used to characterize and understand processes of organizational design (Perkmann and Spicer, 2014; Weick, 1993), entrepreneurship (Baker, Miner and Eesley, 2003; Fisher, 2012), innovation (Garud and Karnøe, 2003; Halme, Lindeman and Linna, 2012) and, more generally, as a way of acting and creating knowledge in organizations (Boxenbaum and Rouleau, 2011; Duymedjian and Rüling, 2010). Bricolage is often contrasted with the more rational problem-solving approaches of the scientifically trained 'ingénieur' (or 'engineer') who typically uses systematic and standardized methods and resources (Lévi-Strauss, 1966). In the management and organizational literature, bricolage is commonly depicted as a rational response to environmental constraints, in particular resource scarcity (Baker and Nelson, 2005; Halme, Lindeman and Linna, 2012) and surprise (Bechky and Okhuysen, 2011; Clegg and Kamoche, 2006). It is presented as an approach, or a managerial tool (Senyard *et al.*, 2014), to solve problems, design, or innovate in penurious or uncertain contexts.

While prior studies have advanced understanding about bricolage in organizational settings as employed to deal with various forms of resource scarcity, we still know little about how bricoleurs present themselves and justify their work beyond references to the effectiveness of bricolage as a problem-solving approach. This relative absence is remarkable, given that in Lévi-Strauss' foundational work, bricolage is not considered a tool one can choose to use on the spot. Rather, it is a 'regime of action', which implies a specific way of viewing and collecting resources, and developing intimacy with them over a long period of time.

As a consequence, this way of thinking and acting grows into a constituting part of the self-identity of practitioners (Baker and Nelson, 2005; Stinchfield, Nelson and Wood, 2013): 'the practice of bricolage contributes to the bricoleur's identity' (Duymedjian and Rüling, 2010, p. 140). This would imply that bricoleurs do not necessarily engage in bricolage because they see it as is an effective response to environmental conditions, but because they consider, and present themselves as 'bricoleurs'.

Despite the growing research on bricolage, literature on bricoleur identities in organizational settings remains limited. While a handful of papers have made a link between identity and bricolage, none has examined this link directly or explored how and why such an identity might emerge. Baker and Nelson (2005) emphasize bricolage as an organizational identity, but do not focus on the implications of this for individual bricoleurs. Stinchfield, Nelson and Wood (2013) identify bricolage as one among many behaviours related to entrepreneurial challenges, one of which includes 'identity'. However, their treatment of this conjunction is brief. Duymedjian and Rüling (2010) also hint at the role of bricolage beyond its functionality or utility, and argue that bricolage is generally seen as a lower-status form of work, which is often concealed and, therefore, incompatible with strong professional identities. However, their paper does not explore further how or why bricolage relates to identity. Conversely, Rao, Monin and Durand (2003) identify bricolage-type behaviours in the production of elite identities within an environment of institutional change, but do not elaborate on bricolage specifically.

In contrast to most studies of bricolage, these texts hint at the potential of engaging bricolage with the identity literature by framing the concept as more than a rational or functional response to environmental constraints. However, these papers tend to focus on the effects of a bricolage identity on organizations, or tend to leave the link between identity and organization inadequately explored. Therefore, our central research question is: how and why are bricoleur identities constructed by practitioners? We suggest that a deeper and more nuanced understanding of how bricoleurs see themselves and their work is important because it might not only help to develop our conceptualization of why and how bricolage occurs, but also shed further light on the organizational enablers and constraints of this work, and the social status of those who engage in bricolage.

We examine the question above using an 'identity work' perspective (Brown, 2015; Snow and Anderson, 1987), which focuses on the processes by which individuals work towards claiming particular types of identities. We explore identity work in the context of management consultancy, a field that is not only made up of a variety of ways of working and organizational strategies (e.g. Hansen, Nohria and Tierney, 1999) that 'discipline' individual identity formation, but also possesses practitioners who seek to form distinctive and legitimate professional identities (Alvesson and Robertson, 2006; Harvey, Morris and Santos, 2017). Drawing on in-depth interviews with 136 management consultants from 50 different firms, we find that in elite ('personalized') firms, bricolage is not only considered an effective response to environmental constraints, but typically represents a prestigious identity that many practitioners pursue. We find that this pursuit becomes apparent in processes of 'embracing', 'distancing' and 'fictive storytelling' (Snow and Anderson, 1987). Interestingly, while we find that the bricoleur identity is encouraged in personalized firms, tokens of bricolage also occur in 'codified' consulting firms where the dominant corporate strategy actively discourages such behaviours. This allows us to question the assumption in much of the extant literature that bricolage is a functional or rational response to environmental or organizational demands.

Our findings contribute to prior literature in at least three ways. First, we enrich the concept of bricolage by going back to Lévi-Strauss' more holistic notion, adding a social anchor to the common view of bricolage as a method or approach. Our elaboration of identity work contributes to the understanding of the occurrence of bricolage in practice beyond discussions about its effectiveness. Second, it highlights the pivotal role of different organizational conditions and how these may enable and constrain the pursuit of bricoleur identities. Finally, it emphasizes the significance of considering the bricoleur as an aspirational elite identity, in contrast to its usual treatment as a 'low status' activity.

The paper is structured as follows. We first introduce and critically review the concepts of bricolage and identity work and further explain why the consulting industry is a useful context for our study. We then detail the methods used to generate

and analyse our data. The findings section explains and illustrates the practices and identity work of bricoleurs and shows how these are associated with different organizational conditions. In the discussion, we reflect on the relationship between bricolage, identity work and context, and on the high status of bricoleurs in management consulting. We conclude with a discussion of the limitations of this study and the avenues for future research opened up by this study.

Literature review

Bricolage

Lévi-Strauss (1966) used bricolage as an analogy to denote the mode of thought of indigenous people as distinct from the way of the modern engineer. A 'bricoleur' is 'someone who works with his hands and uses devious means compared to those of a craftsman' (Lévi-Strauss, 1966, pp. 16–17). The bricoleur's repertoire is typically limited and heterogeneous: limited because there is nothing else available, and heterogeneous 'because what it contains bears no relation to the current project, nor to any particular project, but is the contingent result of all the occasions there have been to renew or enrich the stock' (Lévi-Strauss, 1966, p. 17). When confronted with a problem, bricoleurs are constrained to using the varied leftovers of earlier human endeavours. They take these as starting point, and tweak and recombine them until they reach a solution that works. This process requires creativity, to see new combinations and a myriad of uses of resources (Baker and Nelson, 2005). The bricoleur is a 'Jack-of-all-trades', improvising a solution with the tools and materials at hand.

In *The Savage Mind*, Lévi-Strauss (1966) conceptualized bricolage as a cultural effort, making do with the current repertoire of myths and other symbolic elements, whatever the task at hand. For Lévi-Strauss, it was not a response to external constraints, but a wider socially embedded 'mode of apprehending, ordering and drawing meaning out of the world' (Crandall, 2008). In sociological and anthropological studies, this enabled a view of bricolage as an activity through which one builds meanings, identities and cultures (Berlo, 1992; Ilahiane, 2011). Through these activities, bricoleur identities arise, which become deeply rooted and have a persistence over subsequent projects.

Lévi-Strauss' original conception of the bricoleur has become marginalized in the management and organizational studies (Duymedjian and Rüling, 2010). Rather than using bricolage to typify discursive, cultural or symbolic processes, the common use of bricolage in management literature centres around technical activity, such as repairing motorcycles (Stinchfield, Nelson and Wood, 2013) and developing hydro-power installations (Halme, Lindeman and Linna, 2012), in which discursive elements play a minor role. Here, bricolage is seen primarily as a rational response to particular environmental conditions. Most commonly, scarcity of resources is regarded as the motivation for why bricolage occurs (Baker, 2007; Halme, Lindeman and Linna, 2012). Emphasis is given to the bricoleur's ability to solve problems with a limited set of low-cost resources, collected by scavenging potentially useful materials, often discarded by others (Di Domenico, Haugh and Tracey, 2010; Harper, 1987). Alternatively, unexpected situations and surprises are expected to motivate bricolage (Bechky and Okhuysen, 2011), as it facilitates immediate responses to fix a problem with the material at hand. Responding to scarcity or surprise emphasizes bricolage as a problem-solving approach for situations where the specialized and reliable toolbox of the 'engineer' is not available or not effective. These motivations for bricolage root in the notion of rational choice (Lennefors and Rehn, 2014) in which an individual chooses the most effective way of working for the situation at hand, or – the other way round – the most fitting problem situation for his or her repertoire. In this view, practitioners may also selectively use bricolage (Baker and Nelson, 2005), or search for an optimal level of bricolage (Senyard *et al.*, 2014) to enhance their effectiveness in a certain context.

In addition, the sporadic references to bricolage identities in management literature mostly emphasize the low status and constraints. Organizational bricolage identities enact limitations to growth (Baker and Nelson, 2005) and financial performance (Stinchfield, Nelson and Wood, 2013). Elsewhere, work on bricolage emphasizes its status – a concept related to identities (Alvesson and Robertson, 2006). For example, bricolage is associated with 'dirty work', 'something that one does – perhaps even somewhat shamefully – only when one has to' (Baker, 2007, p. 708). Developing this theme of shamefulness, others have shown

that individuals hide their bricolage when working for demanding customers or in professional organizations in order to get approval and commitment (Batista *et al.*, 2016; Duymedjian and Rüling, 2010). Only Rao, Monin and Durand (2003), in their study of French restaurant chefs, associate bricolage with high status. They conceive bricolage as tinkering with resources from rival categories. There is a penalty on that in the judgment of external reviewers, but high-status chefs, of unquestioned reputation, have leeway to cross traditional boundaries and experiment with heterogeneous resources. In this context, bricolage is the prerogative of the elite rather than the necessity of the bottom of the social pyramid. [Correction added on 20 October 2017, after first online publication: The word "prerogative" was previously misspelt and this has been corrected in this version.]

In order to explore further the relationship between bricolage and identity, we seek to renew the appreciation of Lévi-Strauss' (1966) original conceptualization of bricolage. In line with this, we not only consider bricolage as a method, but also as a cultural process of claiming and constructing meanings. This entails that we study situations in which the tinkering and cobbling together concerns symbolic elements as well as material resources. For this purpose, we draw on the concept of 'identity work', because it allows further explanation of how bricoleur identities are formed and justified in environments that encourage or even discourage them. We further outline this perspective below.

Identity work

Identity work is 'anything we do, alone or with others, to establish, change or lay claim to meanings as particular kinds of persons' (Schwalbe, 1996, p. 105). This definition emphasizes the combination of practices (what is done) and discourses (what is said) in pursuing identities. This is not to say that all practices or discourses are the result of identity work, but that some patterns of these can be (partially) explained through identity work (Kreiner, Hollensbe and Sheep, 2006). Thus, many activities are not only a rational response to organizational needs or strategies, but also a pursuit of desirable identities by employees. Yet, while 'identity work is bound up with processes of identifying "archetypal" characters' (Brown 2015, p. 24) or 'identity archetypes' (Ashforth, Rogers and Corley, 2010), the work itself is always a partial accomplishment, fraught with inconsistencies, tensions and change (Thomas and Davies, 2005). The concept is particularly useful in studying professional identities, because it highlights the 'culturally appropriate self' towards which professionals aspire, even if the achievement of such identities is temporary, provisional or even frustrated (Ibarra, 1999; Thornborrow and Brown, 2009).

Identity work is generated through a dialectic between organizational controls and individual pursuits (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Mumby, 2005; Thornborrow and Brown, 2009). The former concerns cultural and normative regimes (Watson 2008), such as human resource management (Townley, 1994), whereby the organization leverages discourses, policies and routines that encourage the 'self-disciplining' of employees (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). Such selves are generated through specific discourses on which individuals draw (e.g. concerning elitism) and practices which are displayed (such as teamwork) in order to pursue identity archetypes. The latter focuses on how individuals 'confront, shift and pervert organizationally sanctioned systems of meaning' (Brown and Lewis, 2011, p. 871) pursuing alternative identities, which can often reside 'beyond the single organization'. Thus, employees do not have free rein in constructing their identities, as the process is highly dependent on the structural, symbolic and material resources available to them, not least in their own organization (Sveningsson and Larsson, 2006).

In terms of understanding the process of identity work, one founding and influential study is Snow and Anderson's (1987) study of the identity work of homeless people (Fletcher, 2010; Irvine, Kahl and Smith, 2012; Rayburn and Guittar, 2013). This identified three forms of discursive framings that have been explored and developed in more recent work. The first form of framing is distancing oneself from others who are held in contrast to the identity that is being pursued. For example, in Snow and Anderson's (1987, p. 1338) study, the homeless contrasted themselves with people who 'linger at the very bottom of the status system' by claiming that they are different. Distancing often involves 'othering' – 'a process whereby the self is reflexively constructed though what it is not' (O'Mahoney, 2011, p. 7) – and involves pursuing 'high status' identities, often in contrast to a more 'stigmatized' or low-status identity (Toyoki

and Brown, 2013). For instance, in their study, Alvesson and Svenningsson (2011, p. 160) note that the identity work of individuals 'supported a positive (capable) identity of the self and a deficit (insufficient) identity of the other' (cf. Ainsworth and Hardy, 2004). The second is by embracement, which focuses on the acceptance, and sometimes even celebration, of the identity archetype, by displaying excellence in that identity. In Snow and Anderson (1987), the homeless called themselves 'tramps' or 'bums' and displayed strong connections with other 'tramps'. Embracement can also be seen in studies of identities in so-called 'dirty work' (Ackroyd and Crowdy, 1990; Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999; Ghidina, 1992), where such work could be 'cleansed' by connecting the work with alternative identities such as masculinity. Finally, there is what Snow and Anderson (1987) call (fictive) storytelling. In their study, this category includes embellished accounts of the past or present lives of the homeless, which are often aimed at enhancing the status of the individual's actual identity, sometimes with claims to high wages or prestigious jobs, or their potential identity, for example being offered (but rejecting) highly paid work. This category also includes fantasies about their future lives, which ranged from fairly clear plans to set up businesses, to vague dreams about winning the lottery. Yet, others, especially those emphasizing a narrative perspective on identity work, have emphasized the role of storytelling without a judgment on its 'truth' (Alvesson, 2010).

Despite these insights, it is still unclear how different groups within the same occupation approach identity work. It is known that among some professions, such as lawyers, teachers and doctors, different groupings tend to attract high- and low-status identities (Abbott, 1981; Cadinu and Reggiori, 2002; Marmot, 2006; Skevington, 1980). Yet, we know little about the differences in identity work between such groups: 'we are almost wholly ignorant regarding whether, for example, consonant identity work topics or strategies are drawn on and shared by members of similar-type organizations, e.g. management consultancies' (Brown, 2015, p. 31). This may also help us understand whether the processes of identity work detailed above are similar for high- and low-status work within the same profession or whether there are significant differences.

Informed by this literature, we want to examine through which processes of distancing, embracing and fictive storytelling bricoleur identities are being constructed and legitimized. Moreover, we aim to find out how identity work is being enabled and constrained by strategies and control practices in organizational contexts within this field. And finally, we wish to uncover the perceived status of the bricoleur identity within the field of management consulting, and the consequences thereof for the identity work.

Data and method

Context: the consulting industry

In seeking further understanding of bricolage and, in particular, bricoleurs' self-understanding in relation to different conditions, we have focused on the consulting industry. We argue that this is a useful context in which to study bricolage, because consultancy firms encourage and produce identities that are congruent with their strategies (Whittle, 2006). These strategies tend to polarize towards two types: personalized and codified (Hansen, Nohria and Tierney, 1999; Maister, 2003), which influence the types of work consultants are expected to perform (cf. O'Mahoney and Markham, 2013). These strategies are not always binary (Heusinkveld and Benders, 2002), but there are institutional pressures, which tend to push firms towards one or the other. Firms with codified strategies typically pursue high-volume, standardized work, where work practices are based on tightly controlled methods. These companies, such as IBM or Accenture, tend to have high utilization rates (percentage of time billed to clients) and leverage ratios (number of consultants for every partner). In relative contrast, firms with personalized strategies, such as McKinsey, Bain & Co. and niche consulting firms, typically tend to pursue high-value projects delivering tailored solutions. The utilization rates are often lower, leaving consultants time to develop new solutions and build relationships with clients. Moreover, leverage ratios are lower, allowing consultants good opportunities for mentoring by partners.

Sourcing the data

The data for this paper are generated by three series of interviews, carried out by three researchers, all with an explicit focus on repertoire development and usage in the consulting industry. Study

Table 1. Main characteristics of the three series of interviews

	Study A	Study B	Study C
Approach	Exploratory, qualitative		
Method(s)	Semi-structured interviews Document analysis (bids, plans, presentations, meeting minutes, end reports, internal and external publications on models and methods)		
Range of interviewees	Various sectors, consultant to partner, various markets, various sized firms		
Interviews	40–120 minutes, recorded, transcribed by researchers or agency		
Focus	How and why repertoires were developed and applied		How and why repertoires were developed
Region	The Netherlands		UK
Number of interviewees	40 interviews with consultants from 24 firms	24 interviews with consultants from 16 firms	19 interviews with industry representatives/commentators; 25 interviews with consultants from 8 firms; 14 interviews (mostly done twice, 6 months apart) with consultants from 2 firms.

A (40 interviews) and study B (24 interviews) were carried out between 2000 and 2002 and focused on the building of consulting repertoires and their application in concrete projects. Study C (72 interviews) was conducted between 2012 and 2013 and focused on the innovation of consulting products and services. This follow-up study covered fewer companies, but studied them in more detail. Table 1 gives an overview of the studies. The different temporal, organizational and geographic contexts provided a check against bias error on the part of the researchers and enhance the possibility to enrich the emerging constructs.

To find a wide array of informants, we focused particularly on company variation not only in terms of (1) size and (2) sector, but also in terms of (3) strategic focus. As detailed above, the latter tends towards codified and personalized strategies, which require very different types of working (Anand, Gardner and Morris, 2007; Maister, 2003; Morris and Empson, 1998). The types of companies are detailed in Table 2.

To classify our consultancies, we used information from websites and interviews to compare with the characteristics described by Hansen, Nohria and Tierney (1999), including the high-end/low-end market positioning, typical employees and HR strategy, and the existence of common methods and models. See Table 3 for an overview of the main indicators that we used as

Table 2. Overview of the consultancy firms in the series of interviews

	Study A	Study B	Study C
Size/geographical spread			
International firms	4	3	4
National firms	20	9	5
Self-employed/small boutique firms	–	4	1
Sector			
Strategy	3	3	1
Organization development and change management	2	8	2
Leadership and training	1	1	3
Outsourcing and IT	9	–	2
BPR	3	–	1
Several specialisms	6	4	1
Strategy			
Personalized	8	12	5
Codified	13	2	4
Hybrid	3	2	1

Table 3. Main indicators for classification of archetypical conditions

Strategy	Indicators	Exemplary quotes
Economic model		
Codified	High leverage and utilization, low costs	During that period, we employed about 300 people and 15 Partners. A Partner earns far more than the junior; the difference is substantial. These people [partners] have a significant interest in making sure that who enters the firm is as cheap as possible and earns as much money as possible for [consultancy]. (Partner, Big 4 firm)
Personalized	Low leverage, high utilization and costs	A huge difference is that consultants from our consultancy acquire assignments more on the basis of their personal reputation rather than particular concepts. Much of the actual consulting work at clients is performed by the Partners themselves. (Partner, small boutique firm)
Knowledge management		
Codified	Standardized methods tools and products	We have a comprehensive method named Catalyst. That includes everything from vision and strategy, architecture, implementation and maintenance. (Partner, international IT firm)
Personalized	Bespoke, tailored solutions	We don't do one-sized-fits-all … (Consultant, strategy firm)
Information technology		
Codified	Emphasis on knowledge distribution through IT	At [consultancy] there is a knowledge base which not only includes a lot of information about different industries and comparison of industries, but also in terms of methods and techniques. So when I hear on Friday afternoon that I had a project at an aluminium factory on Monday, I would check the knowledge base during the weekend. And on Monday morning I would know more about the industry and about what I should do than the specific client company itself. (Senior consultant, international change management firm)
Personalized	Emphasis on facilitating conversations through IT	Typically knowledge is made accessible to others during what we call professional development days. During these days the people from our unit come together to listen to presentations of cases, but this generally the only way. Knowledge just remains concentrated in the heads of the people within [consultancy]. It is not particularly the case that you can enter the [consultancy] office, open the drawers and simply say there is our knowledge. (Senior consultant, medium-sized OD and change management firm)
Human resources		
Codified	Hire graduates and training in groups	Every two months there is a course Process Development in Paris. At present more than a thousand people in this firm have been trained in the subject of Process Development. For all new business consultants this course is obligatory. (Senior consultant IT firm)
Personalized	Hire experienced people and training through mentoring	A firm such as [consultancy] is positioned in the intersection between science and management practice; most of our people have a PhD and give lectures at a university on a regular basis. All the Partners are well-reputed experts I their respective areas. It does not make much sense to send these people to some sort of content-related trainings. (Partner boutique firm)

a basis for understanding bricolage in relation to different conditions. Firms that we classified as 'personalized' include international boardroom consultancy firms, but also high-reputation national firms and smaller partnerships of experienced consultants. They are active mostly in the areas of strategy consulting, change management and organization development. Consultancies that we classified as 'codified' typically include large organizations with a background in accounting or IT, and also some middle-sized firms specializing in BPR, IT or outsourcing. Where there was ambiguity or firms had different units focusing on different areas and using different strategies, we defined this strategy as 'hybrid'.

Analysis

Our analysis focused primarily on consultants' self-understanding as bricoleurs. In particular, we

concentrated on how they construct their identities, and how this is associated with conditions that are generally considered favourable to bricolage. To this end, we followed an abductive research design (Ketokivi and Mantere, 2010), as we iterated between the data and extant literature in three stages (cf. O'Mahoney, Heusinkveld and Wright, 2013). First, descriptive codes were induced from transcribed interviews, notes and other gathered documents. This was achieved through annotated documents and memos (Boeije, 2010). All three studies focused on the practices of consultants in different types of firms. In the first two studies, codes concerned the type of repertoire, how they were developed, how they were used in problem-solving processes, and how repertoires fitted with client problems. The last study also developed a series of codes concerning client engagement and the implementation of innovations in the repertoire.

Second, on iterating between the emergent codes and literature (Suddaby, 2006; Van Maanen, 2011), it was noted that discourses of elitism, expertise and profession were drawn on by consultants in the way they constructed themselves and their work. In comparing personalized and codified conditions (see Table 3), we noted that descriptions of repertoire development were very different and that these were often used as symbolic examples by consultants. In firms with personalized strategies, the location of value tended to be in the consultant and their expertise in mixing different tools and products to suit new situations. In firms with codified strategies, the value tended to be in standardized tools and services, which the consultant had access to. Consultants here were generally not encouraged to be as creative as those in codified firms, and certainly had less autonomy in their work. Here, we noticed the forms of self-understanding claimed by consultants tended towards two archetypes (Parker 1998), which resonated considerably with bricolage/engineering. Moreover, the way consultants presented, justified and illustrated these archetypes overlapped significantly with themes evident in the literature on identity work– especially that of Snow and Anderson (1987).

Finally, the themes were brought together. The personalization and codification strategies appeared to be systematically related to encouraging bricolage and engineering approaches, respectively. This analysis also revealed different forms of identity work as crucial in the way the bricolage archetype is presented and related activities are justified. Because of that, the three researchers re-analysed their data, using each other's codes. Table 4 gives an overview of the key constructs, indicators and exemplary quotes. This resulted in an emerging framework that identifies different forms of identity work related to the bricolage archetype, and shows how these forms are associated with different conditions.

Bricolage and identity work

Below, we first focus on comparing and contrasting identity work in relation to personalized and codified conditions. Personalized conditions are present in firms with personalization strategies, and codified conditions in firms with codified strategies and, in hybrid firms, both conditions may occur. We then examine the consequences of our findings for extant theorizing. The dynamics of identity archetypes and identity work are summarized in Table 5 and illustrated with exemplary quotes.

Bricoleur identity work in personalized conditions

In relation to personalized conditions, the identity-talk of consultants was highly entwined with skills in developing, combining and creating. In defining these skills, consultants talked about combining a variety of materials – not just 'tools' and 'methods', but also 'books', 'metaphors' and 'art'. The data showed that this was systematically associated with enabling structures and strategies of their firms, and client demands for tailored solutions.

Distancing. In relation to personalized conditions, the bricoleur identity was typically presented and justified through distancing from, or othering, both consultants who undertook more codified work, and less experienced 'newbies':

> I always make a distinction between consultancy and the management services industry. (. . .) That is standardized servicing (. . .). The big firms are heavily involved in the management service industry. They can employ juniors quickly with standardized instruments, while consultancy requires a great deal of overlearning. (Senior consultant, middle-sized OD firm)

In some consultancies, this 'othering' was given corporate support, for instance through the

Table 4. Coding the data

Construct	Indicators	Exemplary quotes
Bricolage		
Problem-solving	Recombination of resources for new purposes	In addition the proposal also includes some E-com and a number of other things such as team management and team building. It's just a hotchpotch of useful concepts that is adapted to the client's situation. (Senior consultant, strategy firm)
Repertoire use	Tweaking and tinkering	I do find such a toolbox important and interesting, and I would like to work on it to share experiences, but I also like to deviate from it if I would consider it more appropriate to a specific situation. (Consultant, niche boutique firm)
Repertoire development	Contingent resource accumulation	I constantly scan concepts, thinking 'that is nice, that might come in handy. (Partner, strategy firm)
Engineering		
Problem-solving	Applying the right resources to a situation	We are a single product department, and a single product department has to have a standard approach. And this standard approach works for that product, but it is not a standard approach to get to the core of the problem, because – if correctly – someone else has done that before us (Partner, Big 4 firm)
Repertoire use	Strict application	This is the method that we use as a standard to acquire new projects and work with clients. [. . .] This is a process of about six to nine weeks and is very structured. We know exactly that we will provide four or five updates to the organization. Teams are trained to apply this method in organizations. (Consultant, Big 4 firm)
Repertoire development	Purposive resource development	Those frameworks are built by the [development] team and constitute a theoretical basis for the way that our entire firm sees work related to the topic Process Development (Consultant, large process firm)
Identity work		
	Distancing	People here have been here so long they forget how to think for themselves … I'm NOT like that. (Consultant, large consultancy)
	Embracement	People call us 'the borg' … [it's] sometimes meant as an insult, but a lot of us like the label. (Analyst, large IT and management consultancy)
	(Fictive) storytelling	I do a lot of board-level work. (Consultant, large IT and management consultancy)

consultancies' refusal to engage with professional associations that gave memberships to consultancies that practised highly codified or implementation work. A senior consultant at a highly prestigious strategy firm told us:

> Part of the reason we, and firms (such as) Bain and BCG don't join the Management Consultancies Association is because they have companies like Accenture and IBM there … which we don't think is proper consultancy.

The data indicated that this form of identity work is particularly aimed at enhancing the status of the bricoleur identity. For instance, in explaining the distancing from professional associations, a senior manager at another firm explicitly linked this to the elite image that these firms were trying to cultivate:

> There's a bit of posturing there … two things – they don't want their brand to be sullied by associating with what they see as weaker companies … they also have this mystique thing where they want to appear aloof and elitist. (Managing consultant, Big 4 firm)

Distancing as identity work becomes particularly apparent in what consultants felt a 'professional' consultant's problem-solving approach should be. In their opinion, a professional way of problem-solving was defined in relation to their own characteristics as someone with the ability to create, tinker and mix up different methods, models and tools. Some consultants went as far to say that people who could not do this type of problem-solving were not really consultants:

> A consultant is someone who can provide a solution to a specific problem … there's no skill involved in developing (or) using an off-the-shelf service or method … one size doesn't fit all. (Partner, niche strategy firm)

Table 5. Bricoleur identity claims in relation to different conditions

Identity claims	Exemplary quotes
Distancing	
• Personalized: Strong distancing from engineering in other firms. Moderate distancing from young identities.	In contrast to much of the other consultancies we work from the specific problem of a client towards a concept. So we are definitely NOT a firm that tend to sell a popular concept. (Director, international strategy firm)
• Codified: Moderate distancing from engineers and engineering approaches within the firm, thereby referring to temporal situation or special skills/knowledge.	To be honest, it's NOT what I thought it was, and I don't think I'll be here long … The pay ain't that [good] and I'm micro-managed … if I don't dot the 'Is' and cross the 'Ts' I get bawled out. (Senior consultant, large IT consultancy)
Embracing	
• Personalized Strong embracing and celebration of bricolage identity.	We're like jugglers … or improvisers … the skill is in being creative when faced with a new client or challenge. (Senior consultant, strategy firm)
• Codified: Aspirational embracing of bricolage identity, while moderate acceptance and embracing of engineering.	I consider myself as someone who deals with these [company] methods and techniques in a rather loose way, but there are colleagues who tend to follow them strictly. I like to have these people around because that prevents me from becoming too lenient. (Senior consultant, international IT firm)
Storytelling	
• Personalized Exaggeration of unique intellectual status in terms of creativity and autonomy.	[N]ot anyone can do this … you have to have that something – creativity – and an ability to think on your feet. (Senior consultant, strategy firm)
• Codified Embellishment of unsanctioned displays of creativity and forms of autonomy, thereby presenting themselves in heroic terms and challenging the system.	It is not the first time that we take up particular ideas and by means of experimenting apply them in client organizations. Often this knowledge is just stolen by the mother company and then we see that it is time to transfer it. This also has to do with positioning: we try to be innovative and introduced new things, but as soon as it tends to become a commodity we are not interested. (Director, boutique firm, daughter of Big 4 firm)

Such distancing also involved consultants telling us what they were not in relation to the repertoire that they draw on. Typically, the bricoleur's repertoire is considered as not structured around a single model or concept and, in relation to this, consultants engaged in identity work to strongly dissociate themselves from these practices:

> I am certainly not someone who can be recognized from a number of favourite models. No, I am terribly eclectic and opportunistic. I am not attached to a model. Nor am I in love with models. (Owner, small OD firm)

Embracement. One important form of identity work associated with personalized conditions, involved strongly embracing bricolage as a superior form. This also was related explicitly to showing artistic abilities and talents for tweaking, tinkering and recombination of resources. For example:

> (I have) the 'chef' approach rather than the McDonald's approach … I experiment … mix things up … or simply following someone else's instructions. (Managing consultant, strategy firm)

Embracement in relation to the development and use of their repertoire particularly involved emphasizing a strong link of identities to dexterity and creativity in using tools:

> You are doing well if you make up new models continuously, but then again drop them. I think that is essential in our profession. (Owner, small change management firm)

(Fictive) storytelling. A final form of identity work in relation to personalized conditions is (fictive) storytelling. This refers to overstatements of consultants' unique intellectual status in terms of creativity and autonomy. Typically, these accounts include self-images in which commercial interests are downplayed and in which their knowledge is presented as cutting-edge:

> Of course you have to earn a certain minimum, but generally the partners don't call the others to account

about their turnover. The main thing that they address is whether you have published recently. And if you publish as much as we do, you are on the forefront of new developments in the field. (Partner, small boutique firm)

This storytelling under personalized conditions also becomes apparent in the self-presentation of the usage of their repertoire. Findings indicated that consultants tended to recount examples of tool adaptation in challenging situations and link these to constructing elite images such as expertise, intelligence or experience.

Working (with a client) I realised that they didn't need to buy (new expensive hardware) … that they could reuse what they already had in a different way … Defective systems could be identified by combining different data which were already (available) … The value in this project was my brain. If it wasn't for those types of insights … would have cost them twenty times as much. (Senior consultant, strategy firm)

As these bricoleurs identified the value in themselves rather than their tools or methods, some also drew on stories about the origin of their repertoires, thereby seeking to display high levels of cultural capital. For instance, one consultant emphasized that his repertoire is the contingent result of a large variety of past experiences, not the least outside his profession:

(B)y working and doing things concretely with people, and then running into something and trying to jointly come up with a model or a trick. So from practice, while working, often inspired by books you read, ideas you hear, or metaphors from other fields, ballet or theatre. Rarely from the professional literature. (Senior consultant, middle-sized firm with several specialisms)

Bricoleur identity work in codified conditions

Our analysis revealed that identity work in relation to codified conditions was more fraught and complex than that under 'personalized' conditions. The work in codified consultancies was typically seen in lower-status terms for employees: or as one informant phrased: 'It's like a lot more boring than you think.' The findings indicate that consultants generally recognized they were in a different type of company that did not necessarily promote the ideal imagery of consulting in terms of the highest pay, the most investment in their employees and the greatest amount of autonomy.

Distancing. In relation to codified conditions, distancing as a form of identity work concerned primarily displays of various forms of dissociation from engineering approaches. We noted various instances in which consultants engaged in emphasizing their own lack of 'fit'.

This isn't really me … the levels of control, filling in a timesheet for every fifteen minutes. I'll probably last another six months. (Analyst, large outsourcing firm)

Another type of dissociation entailed small displays in which, contrary to what their day-to-day work suggested, consultants gave meagre support to their case that their work and their identities were creative, autonomous and broadly skilled. At the same time, it was stressed that these skills were hardly activated in their work within the firm:

I leave my brain at the door when I come here, but I pick it up when I leave … I've got a company I work on outside, new products, coding … more creative. (Associate consultant, IT consulting firm)

Consequently, distancing also entails that the codified conditions are constructed as temporal situations or something that can be mitigated by experience or special skills.

Because I am an expert, I think outside the box … much more so than the others (in the team) who like following rules. (Consultant, outsourcing and IT firm)

Embracing. The findings indicate that identity work under codified conditions also involved that consultants accepted or even embraced their assumed role, finding status in their reliance on codified knowledge. For these consultants, the source of their identity was less likely to be themselves and more their structured methods and tools.

You could do yourself credit, because if you could do a successful project with these professional techniques it would significantly enhance your status as consultant. (Partner, Big 4 firm)

We also found that interviewees' identity work not only displayed acceptance and embracement of the engineering archetype, but even stressed their enjoyment in being part of a context that promotes it.

For instance, in a well-known commodified firm, a group of people were colloquially known as 'the borg' – a reference to identical cyborgs with a single consciousness in *Star Trek*. One interviewee from this company welcomed this analogy:

> The Borg are cool man. I don't have a problem with that. They're powerful and work well together. I don't think that does us any harm. (Analyst, large outsourcing and IT firm)

However, consultants in firms with codified strategies would also embrace minor displays of bricolage as part of their identity. In one large firm, a few consultants had created a small niche in which they could work on complex assignments, mainly spin-offs of the regular business. Others had gained the status of 'master toolmaker' and were allowed to experiment with and further develop new methods. Also, consultants emphasized how experience allowed free-floating, which, in turn, reflected in their self-presentation:

> If you have an interview with a client, then you could say: 'I have the 7S checklist' and ask all the questions. However if you gain in experience you don't need that checklist so much. (...). For me it becomes more like a puzzle that just fits at a given time, even though I don't have all the pieces. (Associate consultant, outsourcing consultancy)

We also encountered consultants in firms with codified strategies who embraced the bricoleur as an aspirational identity. Experienced bricoleurs from reputable firms were sometimes held in almost mythical or heroic status, and associated with discourses of masculinity and age. In one firm, they were known as 'greybeards' and in another 'BSDs', short for 'Big Swinging Dicks':

> The BSD ... you see them swinging it about. They come and go when they please, turn up to wow a client and then they're gone. (Consultant, Big 4 firm)

In any case, the tension between providing ambitious and skilled individuals with the autonomy they wanted and the need for prescription and controls was recognized as an important challenge. As a result, some embracing of the bricoleur identity and distancing from the engineer was often tolerated by the management, but only a little. As one informant explained:

> In essence, a consultant always seeks to put his personal mark on a method because that is related to his ego. With this you want to show that you are unique. This is often explained because they argue that their client is different. If people need that to justify their own interpretation, I'll buy that. Regarding E-business, consultants clearly had to comply to the main lines in the phasing and got an angry phone call from me if they did not do that. (Partner, Big 4 firm)

(Fictive) storytelling. Another important form of identity work was related to accounts of what might be termed 'fictive' or 'fantasy' storytelling. This form of self-presentation involves that, under conditions of codification, consultants accepted the limitations to their opportunities for bricolage, but told strongly embellished stories to construct an image of themselves in heroic terms. This becomes apparent in accounts of unsanctioned bricolage and of occasions in which they had successfully challenged the system. Characteristic of these stories is that they promote a favourable account of the consultant vis-à-vis the firm and the specific conditions for bricolage. For instance, one informant's self-presentation entailed some malicious delight when talking about the situation in the firm after he left:

> (...) I became partner. However, a major issue was that, rather than acting as a researcher, I was expected to sell jobs and keep people employed. Therefore I left (consultancy). Ultimately, most of the people from the unit also left shortly afterwards; it went from 140 to 70 consultants and it is running at a constant loss. (Partner, Big 4 firm)

We also encountered forms of storytelling exploring possibilities to move to personalized firms or become self-employed. Typically, informants refer to situations that do not yet exist or their stories are shrouded in assumptions. One junior interviewee, for example, claimed he did 'a lot of creative board-level work', not realizing that the interviewer, who used to work in the same company, knew that even partners rarely got much facetime with chief executive officers and that the consultant's job was primarily process design. Another new consultant told the interviewer that he was head-hunted by McKinsey, but in a second round of interviews changed the story to 'I have a friend who was head-hunted by McKinsey'.

Discussion

This research has analysed elaborate data on the way in which bricoleurs see themselves and their work in organizational settings. We argued that such an analysis is important because it allows shedding further light on (1) why and how bricolage occurs, (2) the organizational enablers and constraints of this work, and (3) the social status of those who engage in bricolage.

Bricolage as identity work

In management and organization literature, bricolage has been portrayed mostly as a rational approach to coping with the environmental constraints of resource scarcity (Baker and Nelson, 2005; Di Domenico, Haugh and Tracey, 2010; Halme, Lindeman and Linna, 2012; Senyard *et al.*, 2014). In our study, we did find ample accounts of consultants describing their way of working as recombining heterogeneous resources, tweaking and tinkering, and contingent resource accumulation (cf. Visscher, 2006). At the same time, in the way they presented themselves and justified their work, they did not refer to resource scarcity or other environmental pressures. Rather, the construction of bricolage was embedded in identity work; they related their practices to statements about what kind of consultant they were or their identity as professionals.

In further analyses of their identity work (Snow and Anderson, 1987), we found that the cobbling together of models, the inclusion of elements of different types of sources, and on-the-spot improvisation in client organizations is embraced explicitly and associated with experience, wisdom and creativity. Engineering approaches, using extensive, dedicated and well-tested methods to diagnose and solve organizational problems, are often denigrated as tools for juniors and unchallenging situations, or even labelled as 'management services', not 'management consulting'. By 'embracing' the bricoleur and 'othering' the engineer, these consultants construct an elite identity of being 'real' management consultants. Thus, rather than considering their approach as an adaptation to the situation, they discursively frame the situation to fit their approach. These findings suggest that the embracement of the bricoleur identity type provides an important explanation for the occurrence of bricolage in organizational practice. This has been hinted at as an additional explanation for the persistence of bricoleurs in penurious situations (Baker and Nelson, 2005; Stinchfield, Nelson and Wood, 2013), but in this study we show how identity work also helps to explain bricolage practices in the absence of these environmental constraints.

Enablers and constraints of the bricoleur

We found that the identity work of professionals is enabled and constrained by the corporate strategies of the organizations for which they work (Brown, 2015). To a great extent, it appeared that the appeal of the bricoleur identity was cross-company, or even profession-based (Paton, Hodgson and Muzio, 2013). Firms with personalized strategies actively encouraged and provided space for bricolage. Here, the bricolage identity is supported and encouraged precisely because it enables control over highly ambitious, autonomous individuals (Alvesson and Robertson, 2006). Thus, bricolage in these firms is intricately related to the strategies that these firms pursue. However, the success of firms with a codification strategy very much depends on consultants' following the rule book and rolling out standardized, codified repertoires. Displays of bricolage in codified conditions, therefore, represented a challenge to the power of the firm and were discouraged – especially as consulting firms work hard on their cultural or normative controls (Alvesson, 2015; Alvesson and Robertson, 2006; Alvesson and Svenningsson, 2011). Thus, although our interviews suggested that consultants in codified firms wanted to identify with the bricolage identity, their working conditions did not allow them to exhibit these behaviours.

Social status of bricolage

In the management and organization literature, bricolage is generally associated with low status and constraints on development (Baker and Nelson, 2005; Stinchfield, Nelson and Wood, 2013). The lack of standardization in bricolage is a common reason why authors suggest that bricolage is anathema to professional identities. Unlike the findings from other studies (Duymedjian and Ansart, 2004), our interviewees, in particular in personalized conditions, felt no need to hide their engagement with bricolage. Indeed, bricoleur

identities were upheld by consultants of high reputation and facilitated by high-end personalized consultancies. Tokens of this high status can be found in high day-rates, projects at boardroom level and roles of consultants as part-time university professors or writers in professional journals.

In relation to codified conditions, some consultants embraced the engineering identity, based on their knowledge and mastery of commodified tools in their company, but this was rarely done in contrast to bricoleur identities. Here, we also noted some defensive pride, similar to that noted by academics studying identities in lower-status 'dirty work' (Ashforth and Kreiner, 1999). Others, however, sought to distance themselves from an engineering identity, either through fictive storytelling, or by constructing a self held in contrast to others in the company, or defined by what is done outside of the company. Where bricolage was inauthentically claimed, it was often only a temporary phenomenon, in some cases soon followed by leaving the company. The value ascribed to the bricoleur by those in both types of company underline the status of the bricoleur identity type.

How can we explain the possible differences between the status of the bricoleur identity in the context of management consulting compared with some of the other fields in which bricolage has been studied, such as metal working, car repair and the construction industry (Baker and Nelson, 2005; Dumedjian and Ansart, 2004; Stinchfield, Nelson and Wood, 2013)? First, we found that consultants have been able to include references to craftsmanship, artistry and brokerage in their identity. They claim they can tinker with the models in their field because they know and understand them very well – much better than people who only apply them. Furthermore, they emphasize that their creativity enables them to craft unique solutions for unique problems, and that, because of their broad experience, they can cover 'structural holes' (Burt, 2004). This resonates with the suggestions of Stinchfield, Nelson and Wood, 2013) on how bricoleurs can overcome the limitations of their identity. Second, the bricolage of consultants predominantly deals with symbolic resources such as templates, methods and models (Perkmann and Spicer, 2014), which were also central in the conceptualization of bricolage by Lévi-Strauss (1966). This may imply that some of the downsides of bricolage are less constraining. Consultants do not have to delve lengthily into their 'scrapheaps' to find the right physical resources, nor is the required modification of materials as time-consuming. Therefore, the inefficiencies and risks of malfunctioning highlighted by authors who regard bricolage mainly as a technical process (e.g. Senyard *et al.*, 2014) may be less. A third reason may be that, as stated by Rao, Monin and Durand (2003) for restaurant chefs, the unquestioned reputation of some of the individual consultants or the firms they work for gives more freedom to tinker with models and to draw from heterogeneous categories of resources, and less difficulty with legitimating their course of action. The visibility of these 'top consultants', for potential clients and other consultants, has probably added to the high reputation of the bricoleur and their emulation in the field.

Conclusion

The concept of bricolage, with its themes of creativity and pastiche, is one that appears increasingly relevant in a world that is uncertain, complex and ambiguous, and the purpose of this paper was to find out how and why bricoleur identities are constructed by practitioners. By answering this main question in a study in the field of management consulting, we have made the following contributions to theory. First, we have enriched the concept of bricolage by going back to Lévi-Strauss' holistic notion and his attention for symbolic processes, and more specifically by highlighting and elaborating the identity work needed to create and justify a bricoleur identity. This provides more stable roots to the common view of bricolage as a rational approach, and an additional explanation for why bricolage occurs. Our focus on the identity aspects of bricolage is resonant with the elite chefs of Rao, Monin and Durand (2003), whose creativity and experimentation were strongly linked to identity claims of a prestigious elite. A second contribution relates to the organizational context of bricolage. To understand the occurrence of bricolage, bricoleur identities and the potential tensions they give rise to, it is important to consider the social conditions. How does bricolage resonate with the strategies and control mechanisms within an organization, not only looking at how bricolage activities are facilitated or discouraged, but also to what extent bricoleur identity work is encouraged or allowed? A third contribution relates to our discussion of

the status of the bricoleur identity type. To understand the occurrence and appreciation of bricolage in a field, it is important to take into account characteristics of the work and the exemplary identities of the most admired practitioners in that field.

A limitation of this study is that we took the perspective of the individual consultant. Bricolage may appear a soloist activity as scavenging and repertoire creation is mostly done individually. This makes the sharing of repertoires and collective bricolage complicated (Duymedjian and Rüling, 2010). However, in their assignments, consultants cooperate with clients and client organizations, and tap into their knowledge to solve a problem. This joint problem-solving is considered a source of enrichment of the consultant's repertoire, not only because of the problem itself, but also because of the new viewpoints, models and stories of the client. Further exploration of this dimension of bricolage also requires research from the perspective of the client and the people in the client organization.

Another fruitful line of further research within the field of management consulting concerns the study of engineering and bricolage on a company or sector level. Accounting for these different levels of analysis may help reveal 'clusters' of aspirational identities that have not been identified in this paper, and also deepen our understanding about the relation between repertoire-building strategies, their signalling practices to market and the competitive advantage of the consultancy. Studies on knowledge management strategies of consultancies (Hansen, Nohria and Tierney, 1999; Maister, 2003) have stated that consultancies have to choose whether or not they focus on codification of consulting knowledge or invest in the individual repertoires of their consultants. A company-level study could determine whether this holds for engineering and bricolage as well. Furthermore, given that many studies claim that we live in a more uncertain and volatile world (Bennett and Lemoine, 2014), it would be interesting to see whether bricolage identities were prized or claimed by elite groups in society more widely.

Research is needed to determine the pervasiveness of bricolage in firms of different sizes, subfields and strategies, and the effects it can have on firm performance. Consultants associate bricoleur identities with creativity, wisdom and experience, but it requires further research to find out whether the fostering of bricolage and bricoleur identities in companies with personalized strategies really leads to more innovativeness and higher profit margins.

We would also suggest that the potential of bringing bricolage and identity theory further together is significant. Here, we have only had space to examine bricolage in the management consulting industry in relation to identity concepts such as embracing, distancing and storytelling. While this is an important sector in many contemporary western societies (O'Mahoney and Markham, 2013), other studies may seek to explore other identity concepts or examine engineering identities in more detail. It would be also interesting to study bricolage in certain non-western societies where social conformity is a greater part of the culture, which may mitigate against rule-breaking and repertoire creativity. Furthermore, researchers might study bricolage identities in other lines of work for a better understanding of contextual influences. Top managers, internal consultants or technical consultants, for instance, work in different legitimizing contexts, where bricoleur identities can be expected to be valued differently.

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